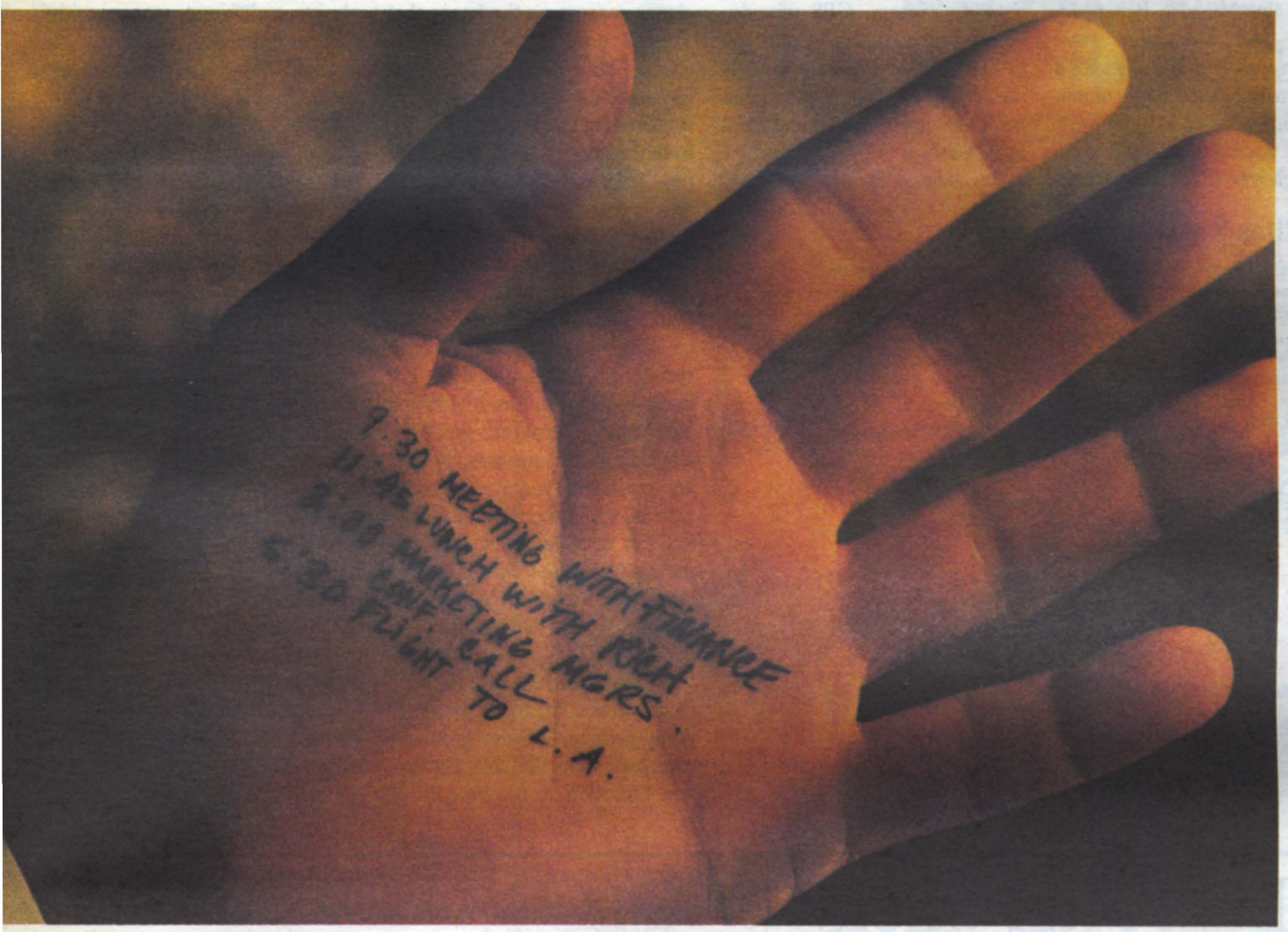
INTEROPERABILITY

CityNet Handles Wellington's Networking Needs

Wellington—I came to New Zealand for the simple reason that I had never been here before. Being a digital tourist, I quickly tire of boat tours on the harbor, so instead I sought out Richard Naylor, MIS manager for the Wellington City Council.

In New Zealand, the City Councils were all-powerful until recently. In Wellington, the city government ran the milk company, the power company and the tram lines. Most of those operations have been spun off as part of a wave of massive deregulation. The city of Wellington is still a big enterprise, however.

Naylor's department acts as a service bureau for many of these companies in addition to handling the needs of the government. Most of this data processing is provided on a large VAX Cluster with the assistance of miscellaneous other computers ranging from PCs to an AS/400 for the library. Tying it all together is CityNet.



Cabling for CityNet consists of fiber connecting dozens of far-flung buildings. When you work for the city, you can do things that others can't always get away with. CityNet was able to lay fiber optic cables on top of the tram lines. Each of the city buildings was wired with twisted-pair. Twisted-pair and fiber form an infrastructure that is used for both voice and data.

The network is certainly an impressive MIS operation, featuring applications like an integrated mapping system with different layers for sewers, electricity, and other city functions. What makes CityNet so interesting, however, is the philosophy of openness they've adopted. The mapping system, for example, is available to Wellington citizens.

CityNet is connected to the Internet, letting city officials communicate with people throughout world. That access helps support clients such as a hands-on science museum. Using the Internet link, kids at the museum and in schools are able to communicate with pen pals throughout the world and download information from scientific institutions.

CityNet goes even further, providing logons to citizens on some spare cycles on a gateway machine. Since the machine is on the edge of the network, data in the VAX Cluster remains secure behind a fire wall and ordinary people get to use the Internet.

Many of the amateur bulletin boards in Wellington are running public domain software that includes the Unix-to-Unix Copy Program protocols. CityNet acts as a mailing hub for these systems, letting a small bulletin board system send messages globally.

A bulletin board can be as simple as a single-user system under this scheme. I watched Richard's 9-year-old kid compose a message on a Toshiba laptop to his pal in Pittsburgh. When he was done, he simply plugged the computer into the phone jack and hit a button to send off the message.

CityNet provides advanced services to its direct clients and at the same time acts as a catalyst, getting the city ready for the future. Naylor even wants to install a tourism server, a machine you could log into from anywhere in the world to plan your vacation in Wellington.

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